Parental mediation of internet use: evaluating family relationships

Book section

CHAPTER 1

Parental mediation of internet use: Evaluating family relationships

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Introduction

One of the major claims regarding changes in contemporary parent-child relationships is that there has been a detraditionalization of various institutions, including the family (Giddens, 1991; Beck et al., 1996). A review of the related literature on 'new' parent-children relations, points to European discussions of 'negotiated childhood', the shift from authoritarian households, changes in power relations within families, and greater intimacy and openness between parents and children (Williams and Williams, 2005). It is argued that such developments have led to more autonomy being experienced by children, and more democratic interactions within the home (Livingstone, 1997). Some writers have contested these developments, emphasising the social control exercised by parents, and hence the power differences that continue to exist in parent-child relations (Jamieson, 1998). Meanwhile, Vestby (1994) paints a more negative picture on the basis of her empirical studies, arguing that in some ways there has actually been a move away from children having autonomy and responsibility to being more protected, making less decisions and experiencing more restrictions in their daily activities. In this volume chapter 2 by Bauwens and chapter 3 by Cardoso, et al present more insights into this field by presenting the results of empirical studies conducted, respectively, in Belgium and Portugal.

Of interest in this chapter, this view of increasingly democratic, sometime intimate, families has been explored and used as a framework in western empirical studies of how parents mediate their children's experience specifically of information and communication technologies (ICTs). For example, this thesis is drawn upon in studies of parents' mediation

of children's mobile phone use (Williams and Williams, 2005). Moreover, to illustrate the fact that these developments may not be simply a Western experience, the challenge to the hierarchical family and greater influence of children in domestic negotiations has also been mentioned in some ICT studies in Asia (e.g. Lim, 2005, on China).

Coming from a different mode of analysis, the sociological literature examining the social construction of childhood would suggest that if some degree of detraditionalization of family life is occurring this in part reflects societal expectations of children, of their independence, of their roles, of what they should know or not know, and these expectations can be different in different countries and at different points in time (e.g. see James and Prout, 1997). Beyond the family, such expectations are embodied in wider public discourses about children and parent-children relationships, as reflected in media representations, expert advice, the practices of institutions and legal frameworks. Indeed, we can see certain broader developments that fit in with less hierarchical families, such as demands for children's rights and the academic call to give children more of a voice in research and to hear children's perspectives (Lobe et al., 2007).[1] At same time the writings on the complementary social construction of parenthood would draw attention to the changing expectations we have of parents, where one key element of relevance here would be that parents may be influenced by the more general pressures for adults to increase the regulation and risk management of children (Livingstone, 1997).

In addition, and sitting alongside these more general claims about the changing experiences of children and of parent-child relations, there is the literature referring to a longer history of anxieties about children's specific relation to ICTs (Drotner, 1999; Critcher, 2008). For example, concerns about the effects of TV on children (e.g. whether it made them aggressive, how much time it took up in their lives) emerged almost as soon as TV appeared (Spigel, 1992), and there were subsequent concerns about children's experience of videos

[1] In fact, this call to hear children's voices informed the *EU Kids Online II* survey reported later in this chapter.

(specifically, 'video nasties' (Barker, 1984)), the addictiveness of video games (Haddon, 1988) and how too much time spent using home computers might adversely effect children's social skills (Turkle, 1984). The point is that whatever generalised changes in parenting may (or may not) be occurring, these specific discourses and related advice to parents may have a bearing upon how parents engage with the children's use of these technologies.

Currently these and other concerns have been translated into even more specific discussions of the risks children face when using the internet, including ones where children themselves are the perpetrators, as in cyberbullying. To codify some of the major concerns into a taxonomy, the first *EU Kids Online* project produced to Table 1, indicating the content, contact and conduct risks[2], where children's roles varied for these three different categories.

For the purposes of this chapter the outline of concerns in Table 1 provides a sense of what potential 'dangers' parents (and other adults dealing with children) are currently supposed to be sensitive to, and these are in many (certainly European) countries the subject of public awareness campaigns, including advice to parents (e.g. to pay attention to what they children do online). Again, we may anticipate some cultural variation in the extent to which different risks have more prominence in different national contexts. For example, an *EU Kids Online* study of press coverage showed the media prominence of the different risks varied across the European countries examined (Haddon and Stald, 2009).

[2] One other key concern that parents have is about the time their children spend online. This is not reflected in the classification in Table 1 and although data was collected on 'excessive internet use' in the *EU kids Online* survey, that material was not used in this chapter.

	Content: **child as recipient**	**Contact:** **child as participant**	**Conduct:** **child as actor**
Commercial	Advertising, spam, sponsorship	Tracking/ harvesting personal info	Gambling, illegal downloads, hacking
Aggressive	Violent/ gruesome/ hateful content	Being bullied, harassed or stalked	Bullying or harassing another
Sexual	Pornographic/ harmful sexual content	Meeting strangers, being groomed	Creating/ uploading porn material
Values	Racist, biased info/ advice (e.g. drugs)	Self-harm, unwelcome persuasion	Providing advice e.g. suicide/ pro-anorexia

Table 1: Concerns about children's online experiences[3]

To add one final layer of complexity, as also noted by other authors in this volume, there are yet other ongoing developments that can influence parents' very ability to implement certain mediation practices. One, occurring in some countries more than others (Haddon, 2004), is the rise of what has been called 'bedroom culture', where children spend more time in the increasingly media rich private space of their bedroom (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001). For example, in 2010 49% of children in the *EU Kids Online II* European survey presented later in this chapter accessed the internet from their own room (Livingstone et al., 2011). This can have some bearing on parents' ability to supervise what their children do online. Another development is children's evolving use of technologies, for example, when parents are either

[3] Adapted from Livingstone and Haddon (2009: 8).

less familiar with the internet in general or with the specific applications that the children use. Meanwhile, the use of mobile devices to access the internet, like smartphones, can once again make surveillance of children's internet use problematic. In fact, in the *EU Kids Online II* survey 33% of the children accessed the internet from a mobile phone or other handheld device (Livingstone et al., 2011).

The *EU Kids Online II* Study

EU Kids Online II built on the work of a prior project, *EU Kids Online*, which had mapped and summarised existing European research on children and the internet. The *EU Kids Online II* goal was to conduct a survey in 25 European countries examined the risks faced by children when using the internet.[4] The study was funded by the European Commissions' Safer Internet Programme in order to strengthen the evidence base for policies regarding online safety – policies which include advising children, parents and others, noted above, as well setting up supporting helplines and dealing with the internet industry.

The survey, where questionnaires were administered in people's homes, involved a random stratified sample of 25,142 children aged 9-16 who use the internet, plus one of their parents. These were interviewed during Spring/Summer 2010. The focus was on pornography, cyberbulling, sexting (sending and receiving sexual messages or images) and meeting strangers offline who had first been meet on the internet (what has been popularly called 'stranger danger'). Hence there were questions about how offline experiences compared to online ones (e.g. bullying versus cyberbullying); whether the experiences were negative (or not) and if negative and to what degree; and how children tried to cope or deal with the experience. Examples of contextual data to help understand responses to risk included socio-demographics, psychological profiles of the children, the range of technologies

[4] More information at www.eukidsonline.net

accessed and how they were used, and parental strategies to mediate their children's online experiences.

This chapter mainly makes use of some of the parental mediation data, combined with some of material on risks when this casts further light on parent-child relationships. It is never going to be straightforward to 'test' some of the claims about changes in family life noted above. There is no before and after measurement of change. The literature reviewed itself indicates that multiple processes may be at work, some specific to ICTs, which could influence the way in which parents engage with their children in this field. Yet, the data captured in the above survey can at least be suggestive concerning relationships between parents and children. First, however, it is important to clarify how the different forms of mediation measured in the survey relate to the earlier discussions of what may be happening in families.

Parental Mediation of the Internet

Over the years there have been a number of ways of differentiating and characterising the approaches that parent's use to mediate their children's experiences of ICTs (reviewed in Kirwil et al., 2009, which also shows the balance of evidence about patterns from previous studies). Building upon and developing the work from this review, the *EU Kids Online II* survey used the following distinctions:

- *Active mediation of the child's internet use* – the parent is present, staying nearby, encouraging or sharing or discussing the child's online activities.
- *Active mediation of the child's internet safety* – whether before, during or after the child's online activities, the parent guides the child in using the internet safely, also possibly helping or discussing what to do in case of difficulty.
- *Restrictive mediation* – the parent sets rules that restrict the child's use (of particular applications, activities, or of giving out personal information).

- *Monitoring* – the parent checks available electronic records of the child's internet use afterwards.
- *Technical mediation of the child's internet use* – the parent uses software or parental controls to filter or restrict the child's use.

The first task is to reflect on how the different forms of mediation fit in with or are in conflict with the claims about the way families are becoming less authoritarian. The first two forms of mediation in the above list would count as variations on a social approach to mediation, the second focusing specifically on safety issues. Arguably both forms of active mediation would in many ways fit in with the claims about detraditionalized parent-child relationships. They contain a mix of elements, as will be clearer in Table 2, but perhaps various forms of talking with the child, showing an interest, engaging with the child, including giving advice, would be the aspects most if keeping with the changes in family life noted earlier, while the being nearby and observing elements are more akin to a social form of monitoring.

Evaluating restrictive mediation can be quite complex, since this can range from simply laying down rules (in what might be seen as a more authoritarian style) to explaining why certain activities need to be avoided because they are potentially problematic (which, in another light, might be considered to be a softer exercise of power). Indeed, the cognitive testing of the survey questionnaire showed that rules can be quite complicated, involving a mix of outright prohibition and allowing permission to do things only under certain circumstances (Haddon and Ponte, 2010).

Monitoring children's internet use, this time via the automatic electronic records kept of that use, might again be difficult to evaluate in relation to claims about the changing family. Such technical monitoring can in principle threaten trust between parents and children, where the importance of trust has been identified as one key principles of intimate relationships such as those in the family (Giddens, 1990; see also chapter 3 by Cardosa et alo in this volume). Such monitoring can be seen by children to be an invasion of their privacy (and privacy from

parents can be very important to children (Pasquier, 2008)). But there might be situations where children accept this checking as a sign of parental interest, or else see it as a trade-off to obtain other rights (an example in the case of mobile phones being the right to stay out longer with friends if teenagers check in from time to time to let parents know their location and plans – Williams and Williams, 2005).

Arguably technical interventions in the form of filters and blocking certain activities are the least in keeping with a non-authoritarian approach and can be taken to indicate a lack of trust – it is the equivalent of the imposition of a rule. Yet part of the safety advice given to parents is to be aware of and consider such options and there is a good deal of effort at the policy and company level to develop and make visible these parental controls.

Having set the scene, the review of findings in the next section, examines the actual patterns of mediation by parents, in terms of comparing the five different types of mediation, reflecting on individual strategies within these five where this seems particular relevant to claims about contemporary family life, and commenting on what picture the specific percentages help to paint, in terms of whether some figures should be seen as being high or low.

Of course, any broad claims about parent-children relationships would require some caveats. For example, there might be somewhat different interactions between parents of younger as compared to older children, reflecting the capabilities of the children, their understanding of the social world and their social skills. Hence the review of findings below specifically compares the experience of younger and older children to see how much difference this makes.

In addition, we might also anticipate some variation within and between countries – for example, previous research on parental mediation has shown variation between households of different socio-economic status and national differences even within Europe (Pasquier et al., 1998; Hasebrink et al., 2008). Therefore some attention is paid to national variation in the

figures that might be hidden by looking at averages, but also to the degree to which some patterns seem fairly common across these countries.

Parent's Mediation Strategies

The above indicates that were might anticipate a somewhat complex set of parental mediation strategies to emerge as parents grapple with these various considerations.

Parents sometimes…	% of all children	% of 9-12 year olds	% of 13-16 year olds
talk to you about what you do on the internet	70	73	66
stay nearby when you use the internet	58	68	48
Encourage you to explore and learn things on the internet on your own	47	51	54
sit with you while you use the internet	44	53	50
do shared activities together with you on the internet	42	50	35

Table 2: Percentages of active mediation of the child's internet use (reported by the child)[5]

One of the most striking results in Table 2 is that seven in ten parents (70%) talk to their children, and nearly half encourage them, which is in keeping with both a more negotiated mediation and advice to parents to show an interest in what their children are doing online.

[5] As the sample is very large traditional significance testing does not really add any useful information about the accuracy of the findings, and this is true for all subsequent tables. The margin of error for the percentages is in most cases around 1 percentage point or even less.

Obviously there is also a fair degree of informal observation of what children are doing, a form of social monitoring, given the 58% who stand nearby and 44% who sit with children when they are online.

The breakdown by age immediately underlines the fact that, as anticipated, the age of the child can really make a difference to how parents mediate that child's online experience. Parents actively mediate younger children's use of the internet much more in all the ways outlined above. The gap is smallest for talking and encouraging, suggesting that many parents continue to take an interest in what older children do, but nevertheless check on them far less and work with them far less.

Parents sometimes …	% of all children	% of 9-12 year olds	% of 13-16 year olds
Explained why some websites are good or bad	68	72	63
Helped you when something is difficult to do or find on the internet	66	75	58
Suggested ways to use the internet safely	63	68	51
Suggested ways to behave towards other people online	56	58	54
talked to you about what to do if something on the internet bothered you	52	55	50
helped you in the past when something has bothered you on the internet	36	37	34

Table 3: Percentages of active mediation of the child's internet safety (reported by the child)

Table 3 shows more detail of what that talking process can involve, here in terms of talking about safety and it includes advice to children about how to evaluate and respond to what they encounter. The fact that roughly two-thirds explain how to evaluate websites (68%), help when children are in difficulties doing or finding something (66%) and give safety advice (63%) is once again in keeping with the vision of more supportive parents, and ones who themselves have listened to the safety advice given to parents. That degree of active engagement is also clear when half (56%) had also talked to their children about appropriate behaviour online and talked about how to deal with something if it bothered them (52%). The lower figure for whether parents actually helped them when they were bothered (36%) reflects the fact that in practice many children have not been bothered by what they encountered online – so in many families the situation never arose.

Once again, when we look at age younger children receive more guidance in mediation to help them develop their critical faculties – in evaluating websites, and in managing internet use effectively – as well as being helped when in difficulty. But to put that in perspective, half or more of the older children also receive these various forms of support and guidance, so it is not as if they have been simply left on their own by their parents. This should be kept in mind in the discussion below of how much parents know about the internet compared to (especially older) children and by implication, how much they are actually in a position to help them.

In Table 4 showing the case of restrictive mediation (and here the figures cover any form of rules, even conditional ones), the list of options is dominated by rules about children disclosing personal information – in fact, if parents make any rules at all, it includes rules about this issue. The second most common rules, about uploading material (63%) may be high because they can include photos or videos of the children themselves – again, a form of self-disclosure. The fact that downloading is also fairly strongly regulated or restricted (57%), arguably reflects wider discussions about copyright issues and illegal downloads.

Rules apply about….	% of all children	% of 9-12 year olds	% of 13-16 year olds
giving out personal information to others on the internet	85	93	78
Uploading photos, videos or music to share with others	63	71	46
downloading music or films on the internet	57	77	40
having your own social networking profile	47	70	28
watching video clips on the internet	39	58	22
using instant messaging	38	59	21

Table 4: Percentages of parents using restrictive mediation of the child's internet use (reported by the child)

When we look in more detail at age, yet again 9-12 year olds experience far more restrictions for each activity in general compared to 13-16 year olds, the one exception being the issue of giving out personal information, where the figure of 78% is still high, even for the older children. But for uploading, downloading, watching video clips, instant massaging and especially having an SNS profile, the overall figures for children are as high as they are mainly because of the restrictions on young children. Some of the figures for the older children are quite low.

Parents sometimes check …	% of all children	% of 9-12 year olds	% of 13-16 year olds
Which websites you visited	46	59	36
Your profile on a social network or online community	40	57	33
Which friends or contacts you add to social networking profile	36	52	28
The messages in your email or instant messaging account	25	41	18

Table 5: Percentages of parents monitoring the child's internet use (reported by the child)

It seems that the various electronic monitoring strategies that involve checking children's internet use are less favoured in comparison to positive support, safety guidance or making rules about internet use. Nevertheless, in Table 5 just under half (46%) still check which websites children visit and around four in ten check their children's social networking profiles (40%) or the friends who are added to those profiles (36%). A quarter (25%) even check actual messages, which from the child's perspective can be very personal and might well be seen as a greater invasion of their privacy than some of the other interventions. Once again, the overall figure for children hides the fact that there are notable age differences where parents may be trying to respect teenager's privacy especially.

Parents make use of …	% of all children	% of 9-12 year olds	% of 13-16 year olds
software to prevent spam/junk mail or viruses	73	74	73
parental controls or other means of blocking or filtering some types of website	28	37	25
parental controls or other means of keeping track of the websites you visit	24	33	20
A service or contract that limits the time you spend on the internet	13	17	11

Table 6: Percentages of parents using technical mediation of the child's internet use (reported by the child)

In Table 6, the major form of technical intervention observed in this survey – the three-quarters of parents using spam protection software (73%) – does not relate so much to taxonomy of risks and is unlikely to be an issue of contention with the child. Beyond this, use of technical tools is relatively low, especially in comparison to other parental mediation strategies, and this would count as evidence for the spread of less authoritative parenting. That said, roughly a quarter of parents block or filter websites (28%) and/or track the websites visited by the children (24%), a sign that a significant minority have been influenced by concerns and the promotion of these control tools. In line with the results for the other forms of mediation, there are major age differences (apart from the case of spam and virus software) with parents being more willing to consider technical controls for the younger children.

To finish this section it is important to reflect on potential national differences since it noted earlier that the previous figures are all averages from the whole European sample, and so one question is whether this hides substantial European variation. Given the social construction of parenthood writings point to potential country variation, can we find any clues of this within a European sample, or is Europe relatively homogenous in its parent-children relationships – at least specifically in relation to internet use?

General forms of parental mediation	**% adopting one of more examples of mediation according to the child**	**Country range according to child (%)**
Active mediation of the child's internet use	87	73-97
Active mediation of the child's internet safety	86	70-97
Restrictive mediation	85	54-92
Monitoring	50	26-61
Technical mediation of the child's internet use: Parietal controls	28	5-46

Table 7: Country variation in mediation practices (reported by the child)

In Table 7 we see a version of the data that, for most types of approaches to mediation, combine the different individual strategies – e.g. as regards active mediation, did the parents ever talk to the child, stay by them, encourage them, sit with them or engage in shared activities. When comparing our five approaches, active mediation of use and of safety information have the lower ranges, and they would be lower still if not for Turkey being an outlying in both cases (low on both: 73 and 70 respectively). In other words, most countries scores were similar, with only a relatively few percentage points difference. In the case of restrictive mediation, there are three countries with low scores (Lithuania at 54%, Estonia at 73% and Poland at 65%). If not for these countries, the overall range would be narrower, although slightly less so than in the case of the two forms of active mediation. But the range is wider for monitoring and technical mediation, (in the latter case only the one activity of using parental controls is considered). Here the countries are just a little more diverse with more spread about from the average. In other words, one can argue that the averages discussed in previous tables provide a reasonable guide to what is happening across Europe for the two forms of active mediation and to some extent restrictive mediation. But perhaps in part reflecting the complex picture of different national discourses about parental-child relations and about internet safety in particular, we seem to have more variation in the case of monitoring and using parental controls. The fact that we had some countries with low scores noted above also shows where the national variation may lie.

Responses to and Evaluations of Mediation Strategies

The results so far have shown the patterns of parental mediation, and these have been evaluated in large part in terms of what they suggest about the broader nature of parent-child relations. But the survey also collected data not captured in previous research on children's evaluation of and response to mediation. This can provide further clues about how the children see those relations with parents, at least as it pertains to their internet usage.

But first, to provide a wider context, one observation made by several researchers is that parents often know less about the internet than their children, a theme highlighted in characterising parents as 'digital immigrants' compared to children who had grown up with the internet as being 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001), discussed at length in the introduction, the conclusion, chapter 4 by Herold, chapter 8 by Lugano and Peltonen and chapter 10 by Loos and Mante-Meijer in this volume). In fact one change noted in an earlier review of evidence conducted by *EU Kids Online I* is that this was becoming less the case as more parents were using the internet (Hasebrink et al., 2008). Moreover, the *EU Kids Online II* survey indicates that parents often know more than specifically younger children – or at least 63% of 9-10 year olds claim this. But over and above this, even for parents less skilled in internet use it is still the case that they can, for example, ask about their children's use. This awareness is not only potentially important for their ability to support their children (when faced with things that make them uncomfortable) but the extent of that knowledge can also be indicative of the general relationship they have with their children.

Parents know about their child's internet use (reported by the child):	% of all children	% of 9-12 year olds	% of 13-16 year olds
a lot	32	44	22
quite a bit	36	33	39
just a little	24	16	6
nothing	7	6	9

Table 8: How much parents know about their child's internet use (reported by the child)

When we check the actual survey findings, Table 8 shows that two-thirds of children (68%) think their parents know a lot or quite a bit about the children's internet use, only 7% claiming that their parent knows nothing. This suggests that some of the prevalent forms of mediation we observed earlier, such as talking, but also observing, have led to an understanding of this part of their child's life, more in keeping with the view of the more engaged parents.[6] In particular younger children are more likely to think their parents know a lot, which is in line with the finding that parents mediate their experiences more than they do those of older children.

When charting children's multifaceted evaluation of and response to parental mediation of their experience of the internet, one first question asked of the children was whether they thought that overall that mediation had a positive outcome. In fact, in Table 9 over two-thirds of children (70%) say it helps a lot or a little. Younger children aged 9-12 years old were even more positive, perhaps reflecting their relative lack of skills; for them, parental mediation may indeed be more helpful. That said, nearly two- thirds (63%) of older children also said that parental mediation helps. Clearly this is moving away from an image of parents as digital immigrants who are in no position to support their child online.

A second dimension of children's evaluation was how constraining the children felt parental mediation is felt to be, since if it is seen to be a major limitation then children might have a more negative evaluation of that intervention. In practice Table 9 shows that a majority (56%) do not find mediation burdensome in this respect, and of the remainder, only 11% say it limits their activities a lot. The younger children are somewhat more likely to say it limits

[6] In may be partly because of this level of engagement that the majority of parents (85%) are confident about their role, feeling that they can help their child a lot or a fair amount if their child encounters something that bothers them online.

them, and that it limits them a lot – which reflects the reality that parents mediate their use more.

Whether parental mediation helps (reported by the child)	% of all children	% of 9-12 year olds	% of 13-16 year olds
Yes, a lot	27	35	20
Yes, a little	43	43	43
No	30	21	38
Whether parental mediation limits the child's activities	All children	9-12 year olds	13-16 year olds
Yes, a lot	11	15	8
Yes, a little	33	37	33
No	56	30	62
Whether the child ignores what parents say when they use the internet	All children	9-12 years	13-16 years
Yes, a lot	7	6	8
Yes, a little	29	25	30
No	64	69	62

Table 9: Evaluation of and response to parental mediation (reported by the child)

Finally, when we look at how the children respond to that parental mediation, only a small proportion of children (7%) in Table 9 say they simply ignore it – this is more likely amongst

teenagers. While over a quarter (29%) may not always follow their parents advice (or instructions), saying they ignore them a little, perhaps the most striking figure is that nearly two-thirds (64%) say they do not simply ignore that mediation – and that includes 59% of older children. In other words, and in keeping with the fact that they do not find it overly limiting, the clear majority pay attention to their parents' interventions, rather than exhibiting outright resistance.

Pulling these different strands together what emerges is a fairly positive evaluation that does not in itself prove that less authoritarian parenting is taking place but does suggest reasonably good relations between parents and children, where mediation is by and large acceptable. Parental mediation can at worst limit the activities of some children, but for most is not too onerous. Many children appear to value that parental engagement, saying it helps, and by and large they are willing to listen to it (at least some of the time). Although there are age differences as has been consistently true across all these results, this applies to many of the older children as well.

Whether a child would like his/her parent(s) to take more or less interest in what he/she does online	% of all children	% of 9-12 year olds	% of 13-16 year olds
A lot less	3	3	4
A little less	9	9	9
Stay the same	72	69	75
A little more	10	12	8
A lot more	5	7	4

Table 10: Whether the child would like his/her parent(s) to take more or less interest in what they do online (reported by the child)

Given this overview, the test of the acceptability of this mediation was a final question asking whether the children thought parents should take more or less interest in what they do online. In Table 10 most children (72%), and even more so for teenagers, judge that parents have got it about right, since these children think the level of parental interest in their online activities should stay the same. In fact, while 13% would like their parents to do rather less, 15% would even like their parents to do a little or a lot more, welcoming greater engagement. For once there were limited differences between older and younger children, so to finish of the picture of parent-child relationships in this field, both age group were overwhelmingly positive about the level of parental engagement.

Risk Areas

While the above outline provides a picture of children's general responses to and evaluations of parental mediation, it is possible to seek an even more nuanced picture by looking more in detail at specific risks investigated, given that these might be potentially 'sensitive' experiences where the child might not want to alert the parent.

As noted earlier. the areas covered in some detail were encounters with pornography, cyberbullying, sexting and contact with strangers. The experience of risk itself is not the main interest of this chapter, but it is worth pointing out that the incidence of these experiences is not so high anyway[7] (Livingstone et al., 2011). Moreover, when asked whether (and if so how much and for how long) they were bothered by these experiences, only small proportions of children had very negative or long lasting experiences.

[7] The lower numbers of children mean that it is not possibly to even consider more detailed cross-national comparison.

Parents knowledge of those children who had various risk experiences (reported by parents)	**% of parents saying child has no experience**	**% of parents saying child has experience**	**% of parents saying they do not know**
Seen online pornography	40	35	26
Been bullied online	56	29	15
Received sext messages	52	21	27
Met an online contact offline	28	61	12

Table 11: Parents' knowledge of those children who have had various risk experiences (reported by the parents)

What Table 11 shows is, in cases where the child has had one of the four experiences listed above, whether the parent (a) thinks their child has had the experience, (b) thinks they have not, or (c) does not know. Only in the case of meeting an online contact offline did the majority of parents know about this. The overall message from this set of questions is that although parents may talk a good deal with their children, and many in general know what their children are doing, there are some experiences online parents do not know about, more

so for some risk areas than others – e.g. only a fifth (20%) knew their child sext messages and three in ten (29%) knew their child had been bullied. In fact, the bottom row indicates that some parents are aware that they simply do not know about whether their child has had these experiences.

Children talking about negative experiences (reported by the parents)	**% who talked to someone about it**	**% who talked to a friend**	**% who talked to mother or father**
Seen online pornography and was bothered	53	33	25
Been bullied online	77	50	40
Received sext messages and was bothered	60	37	29
Met an online contact offline and was bothered	62	35	28

Table 12: Whether children talk to parents or others about negative experiences (reported by the parents)

The fact that this lack of parental awareness may be because the children do not want to talk to them about certain aspects of their lives appears to be supported by the evidence in Table

12 showing whom the children talked to if they had a negative experience.[8] Arguably it is a good thing that for each experience a majority talked to someone about something that was problematic, more so for bullying (77%) and least so for pornography (53%). But for each of the four experiences more children preferred to talk to peers about it and only between a quarter (25% for pornography) and four in ten (40% for bullying) wanted to talk to a parent. This reminds us that whatever the general rapport and understanding between parent and child, and there has been plenty of evidence of that, some things remain relatively private from parents.

Conclusions

Using survey material to reflect upon major claims about developments in family relations is problematic because we have at best a snapshot of what is supposed to have been a process of change over time. Moreover, this is compounded by the fact while the claims about greater negotiation in families are very general, the particular area researched in the survey has associated with it a history of anxieties about children and ICTs, and indeed an ongoing set of social discourses and actions, manifest in advice to parents about what they should be doing. Therefore, one would expect complex results from multiple considerations.

The questions in this survey may not have been developed specifically to measure parent-child relations per se, but when combining different data, measuring a variety of dimensions, it is possible to build up some picture of those family relationships, at least a regards parental mediation of ICTs. Generally relationships appear to be positive, the interventions are regarded as helpful, they are often heeded (at least far more than would be anticipated in some accounts of rebellious teenagers) and appreciated. One could argue that this could all hold true if more authoritarian relationships in families existed, but in keeping with the similar conclusion reached in chapter 3 by Cardoso et al in this volume, it seems

[8] It was assumed that being bullied is by its nature always negative.

much more plausible that these sentiments would be expressed in less hierarchical families, experiencing more negotiation. However, the last section reminds us that these good relations do not always translate into transparency in sensitive areas where children would still like to keep some privacy from parents, and prefer support from peers.

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